DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 454 SP 036 216

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TITLE Storying the Self: Life Politics and the Study of the Teacher's Life and Work.
PUB DATE 27 Apr 95
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *Personal Narratives; Preservice Teacher Education; *Self Concept; *Social History; *Social Influences; Teacher Responsibility; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Identity Formation; Postmodernism

ABSTRACT

The current changes in the economy and the superstructure associated with postmodernity pose particular perils and promises for the world of education. In particular, identity is no longer an ascribed status or place in an established order. Rather, identity is an ongoing project, most commonly an ongoing narrative project.The use of personal stories and narratives in teacher education has to respond meaningfully to the new conditions of work and being in the postmodern world. However, in this individualistic construction, the role of the collective subject is obscured though tribal and collective identities continue to appeal. Therefore, the movement to give teachers voice in telling and studying their own stories may be problematic. Current educational restructuring may move the teacher away from moral responsibility to a narrow technical competence as teaching's area of moral and professional judgment is severely reduced. The paradox is that teachers' personal and practical stories and voices are being encouraged at a time when teachers' are being held accountable and having their work prescribed, interrogated and evaluated. In fact, stories and narrative may form an unintended coalition which would divorce the teacher from knowledge of political and micro-political perspective from theory, and from broader cognitive maps of influence and power. (Contains 14 references.) (JB)

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ED 386 454

Storying the Self: Life Politics and the Study of the Teacher's Life and Work

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April 27, 1995

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1995.

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Storying the Self:

Life Politics and the Study of the Teacher's Life and Work

Preparing for Postmodernity: The Peril and Promise

The current changes in the economy and superstructure associated with postmodernity pose particular perils and promises for the world of education.

As Wolfe has argued, it is quite conceivable that it will not just be public social services which are dismantled in the new epoch but also aspects of the superstructure (Wolfe, 1989). In particular, some of the median associations such as universities and schools might be diminished and decoupled in significant ways. This means that institutional sites may not be any longer the only, or major, significant sites of definition and contestation and it also means that methodological genres which mainly focus on institutional analysis and institutional theorizing may be similarly diminished.

Associated with this restructuring of institutional life is an associated change in forms of knowledge, particularly the forms of workplace knowledge which will be promoted. Significantly, much of the workplace knowledge currently being promoted is context specific and personal (Goodson, 1993, pp. 1-3). Putting these two things together means that different sites for definition and delineation will emerge in the postmodernist period. Firstly, there will be the continuing struggle for the theoretical and critical mission inside surviving but conceivably diminished institutional sites and existing social arenas.

Secondly, and probably progressively more important for the future, will be the site of everyday life and identity. It is here that perhaps the most interesting project, what Giddens calls "the reflexive project of the self", will be contested in the next epoch. Life politics, the politics of identity construction and ongoing identity maintenance, will become a major and growing site of ideological and intellectual contestation. In this regard, new modes of phenomenological work, with their focus on lived experience, may prove to be prophetic. The agenda standing before us is one where identity and lived experience can themselves be

used as the sites wherein and whereby we interrogate the social world theoretically and critically. If that sounds too grandiose (which it does), what it really means is that we should be investigating and promoting more contextual and intertextual studies of the process of identity, definition and construction, especially the life history genre.

Here the important distinction is between life story and life history. The life story is the initial selected account that people give of their lives: the life history is the triangulated account, one point of the tripod being the life story but the other two points being other people's testimony, documentary testimony and the transcripts and archives that appertain to the life in question.

Storying the Self

The use of personal stories and narratives in teacher education has to respond meaningfully to the new conditions of work and being in the postmodern world. As a number of social scientists have recently argued, this means we should reformulate our conceptions of identity and self-hood. The global forces which are undermining traditional forms of life and work are likewise transforming notions of identity and self. Identity is no longer an ascribed status or place in an established order rather identity is an ongoing project, most commonly an ongoing narrative project.

In the new order, we 'story the self' as a means of making sense of new conditions of working and being. The self becomes a reflexive project, an ongoing narrative project. To capture this emergent process requires a modality close to social history, social geography and social theory - modes which capture the self in time and space, a social cartography of the self.

The huge interpenetration of local and personal milieux with major global forces of information dissemination and economic redefinition is leading to a range of responses. One response undoubtedly is a new focus on the 'reflexive project

of the self' — this leads to a form of centring best expressed in a recent comment by a teacher in a recent interview "what is home now — home is where I am". This response clearly links with a long tradition of romantic individualism in western history. In this form the life story is seen as the individual construction of the autonomous self.

However in such individualistic construction, the role of the collective subject is obscured. Tribal and collective identities continue to appeal. In fact one paradoxical response of growing global homogeneity is the stress on 'the politics of minute difference'. In this way countries fragment in pursuit of local tribal identity — the Balkan situation is perhaps an extreme example but the phenomenon can be viewed worldwide. This is not, as is sometimes claimed, an identity project harking back to old warrior tribes in Europe and Africa. It can, for instance, be as clearly evidenced in Canada not only as French identity pushes Quebec towards independence but as western identity is pushing Western Canada towards the embrace of increasingly 'regional' politics. In times of rapid global change we stress the 'sense of place', of local identity, that we know.

Sigmund Freud argued that the smaller the difference between two people the larger it was bound to loom in their imagination. He called this effect the 'narcissism of minor difference' (see Ignatieff, May 13, 1993, p. 3). Life story work can, in fact, do much to exacerbate the 'narcissism of minor difference' especially given the focus on the individual, the personal, the specific, the selective, and the idiosyncratic. The life history might restore aspects of the political, the collective, the general, the contextual and the social.

For Giddens, the reflexive project of the self,

> consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the

> more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. (Giddens, 1991, p. 5)

he spells out some of the implications of the emerging social order for life-cycles.

> Self-identity for us [in the late modern age] forms a *trajectory* across different institutional settings of modernity over the *duree* of what used to be called the "life cycle," a term which applies more accurately to non-modern contexts than the modern ones. Each of us not only "has," but *lives* a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, "How shall I live?" has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat — and many other things — as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity. (Giddens, 1991, p. 14)

> The idea of the "life cycle" ... makes very little sense once the connections between the individual life and the interchange of the generations have been broken ... Generational differences are essentially a mode of time-reckoning in pre-modern societies. ... In traditional contexts, the life cycle carries strong connotations of renewal, since each generation in some substantial part rediscovers and relives modes of life of its forerunners. Renewal loses most of its meaning in the settings of high modernity where practices are repeated only in so far as they are reflexively justifiable. (Giddens, 1991, p. 146)

Above all Giddens is arguing that the "situational geography" (p.84) (what we called earlier the social cartography) of modern social life and modern social selves has been drastically repositioned by the electronic media to the extent that the experience of social life and self is more fluid, uncertain and complicated than in previous epox. In the global market place, we are allowed to choose between a series of decontextualized self identities rather in the manner of the commodified market place generally. Hence, the local and traditional elements of self are less constitutive. This leads to the self as an ongoing reflexive and narrative project for as Giddens writes "at each moment, or at least at regular intervals, the individual is asked to conduct a self interrogation in terms of what is happening". (p. 76)

In Giddens' work, it is as if he is trying to re-assert the place of individual

self storying at a time where the self is being ever more commodified, saturated and legitimated. Storying the self then becomes an ongoing process of self building and self negotiation; in this sense it is possible to see the self as an ongoing project of storying and narrative.

This conceptionalization of self building is not unlike the conclusions arrived at by Leinberger and Tucker in their book *The New Individualists* (1991). Here they are concerned with the offspring cohort from the "organization men" of William Whyte's study in 1950. They argue that the whole epistemological basis of individual life has shifted because of the economic and social changes of the last decade. This economic and social change plays itself out in what they call a different "self ethic".

> As the organization offspring came of age in the sixties and seventies, they were exhorted to find themselves or create themselves. They undertook the task with fervor, as self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-assertion, self-actualization, self-understanding, self-acceptance, and any number of other *self* compounds found their way into everyday language and life. Eventually, all these experiences solidified into what can only be called the self ethic, which has ruled the lives of the organization offspring as thoroughly as the social ethic ruled the lives of their parents. Many people mistakenly regarded this development as narcissism, egoism, or pure selfishness. But the self ethic, like the social ethic it displaced, was based on a genuine moral imperative—the *duty* to express the authentic self. (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991, pp. 11-12, Leinberger and Tucker's emphasis)

Leinberger and Tucker push the argument about self to the point where they argue that the (supposedly) authentic self is being replaced with by "an artificial self".

> In pursuing the ideal of the authentic self, the offspring produced the most radical version of the American individual in history—totally psychologized and isolated, who has difficulty "communicating" and "making commitments," never mind achieving community. But by clinging to the artist ideal, the organization offspring try to escape the authentic self and simultaneously to maintain it as the ultimate value. It is a delicate

> balancing act to which many of them have been brought by the search for self-fulfillment, but it is a position that they are finding increasingly hard to maintain.
>
> As our story will show, there are signs that the search for self-fulfillment is drawing to a close and with it, the era of the authentic self and its accompanying self ethic. The ideal of the authentic self is everywhere in retreat. It has been undermined from within; it has been attacked from all sides; and, in many ways, it simply has been rendered obsolete by history. (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991, pp. 15)

In their study, they provide an important and exhaustive list of reasons for the end of the era of the authentic self. The list itself provides some glimpses of their implicit conception of authenticity and is worth reviewing in full:

- Self-fulfillment has proved to be unfulfilling, since the exclusive focus on the self has left many people feeling anxious and alone.
- The inevitable economic problems experienced by large generations, coupled with the long-term souring of the American economy, have introduced many members of the generation, even the most privileged among them, to limits in all areas of life, including limits on the self.
- Alternative and more inclusive conceptions of the self, especially those introduced into organizations by the influx of women, now challenge almost daily the more traditionally male conception of unfettered self-sufficiency.
- The macroeconomic issues of takeovers, buyouts, and restructurings that have dominated organizations for the past five years have left little room for psychological concerns in the workplace.
- The rise of a genuinely competitive global marketplace linked by instantaneous communications has accelerated the diffusive processes of modernity, further destabilizing the self.
- The centuries-old philosophical bedrock on which all our conceptions of individualism have rested, including the highly psychologized individualism embodied in the authentic self, is being swept away.
- Similarly, the most important developments in contemporary art *and popular entertainment* are subverting

> the conception of the artist on which the integrity of personalities who use the artist ideal to solve problems of identity depends.
>
> - The rise of postmetropolitan suburbs, which are neither center nor periphery, and the emergence of organizational networks, which replace older hierarchical structures, have thrust the new generation into concrete ways of life to which the authentic self is increasingly extrinsic (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991, pp. 15-16, their emphasis).

They argue then that the authentic self is being replaced by what they call 'the artificial person'. Whilst this would seem to polarise authenticity and artifice too greatly, it is an interesting distinction to pursue and the authors make clear the ambiguities that are present:

> Out of this slow and agonizing death of the authentic self, there is arising a new social character: the artificial person. This new social character is already discernible among a vanguard of the organization offspring and is now emerging among the remainder; it is likely to spread eventually throughout the middle class and, as often happens, attract the lower class and surround the upper.
>
> It cannot be emphasized enough that the designation *artificial person* does not mean these people are becoming phony or insincere. Rather, it refers to a changing conception of what constitutes an individual and indeed *makes* someone individual. In the recent past, the organization offspring believed that individuality consists of a pristine, transcendant, authentic self residing below or beyond all the particular accidents of history, culture, language, and society and all the other "artificial" systems of collective life. But for all the reasons we have cited and many more besides, that proposition and the way of life it has entailed have become untenable. More and more the organization offspring are coming to see that the attributes they previously dismissed as *merely* artificial are what make people individuals—artificial, to be sure, but nonetheless persons, characterized by their particular mix of these ever-shifting combinations of social artificiality of every variety. Starting from this fundamental, and often unconscious, shift of perspective, they are evolving an individualism that is "artificial" but particular, as opposed to one that is authentic but empty. It is an individualism predicated not on the *self*, but the *person*: while *self* connotes a phenomenon that is inner, nonphysical, and isolated,

> *person* suggests an entity that is external, physically present, and already connected to the world. In effect, it is the realization that *authentic self* is more of an oxymoron than is *artificial person*. (Leinberger and Tucker, 1991, pp. 16-17, their emphasis)

The process of self-definition or as Leinberger and Tucker would have it, person building, is increasingly recognised as an emergent process, an ongoing narrative project. In this emergent process, stories and narrative change and metamorphose over time. The life story changes and so does its meaning for both the person and the listener. The story or narrative then provides a contemporary snapshot of an ongoing process — every picture tells a story but as the picture changes so do the stories. To establish a broader picture we need to locate the stories and collaborate in the discussion and understanding of stories and narratives.

> A life, it is assumed, is cut of whole cloth, and its many pieces, with careful scrutiny, can be fitted into proper place. But this writing of a life ... is constantly being created as it is written. Hence the meanings of the pieces change as new patterns are found (Denzin, 1989, p. 20).

> the beginning coincides with the end and the end with the beginning - which is the end - for autobiography (like fiction) is an act of ceaseless renewal: the story is never 'told' finally, exhaustively, completely (Elbaz, 1987, p. 13).

Narratives or life stories are a vital source for our studies of the social world in general and teaching in particular. But they are singular, selective and specific (both in time and context). In these senses unless they are complemented by other sources they are of limited value in understanding the patterns of social relations and interactions which comprise the social world. Indeed a primary reliance on narratives or life stories is likely to limit our capacity to understand social context and relationships as well as social and political purposes. Sole reliance on narrative becomes a convenient form of political quietism - we can continue telling our stories (whether as life 'stories' or research 'stories') and our

searchlight never shines on the social and political construction of lives and life circumstances. No wonder the narrative and life story have been so successfully sponsored at the height of New Right triumphalism in the west. As we witness the claim that we are at 'the end of history' it's perhaps unsurprising that life stories are being divorced from any sense of history, any sense of the politically and socially constructed nature of the 'circumstances' in which lives are lived and meanings made. Truly men and women make their "own history" but also more than ever 'not in circumstances of their own choosing'. We need to capture 'agency' but also 'structure': Life stories but also life histories.

In this sense the distinction between life stories/narratives and life histories becomes central. The life story comprises the person's account of her/his life (most often delivered orally) at a particular point in time. The life history supplements the life story with data drawn from other peoples accounts, official records and transcripts and a range of historical documentation.

The data then is distinctive but so too are the aspirations of life story and life history. In the first case the intention is to understand the person's view and account of their life, the story they tell about their life. As W.I. Thomas said 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'. In the life history, the intention is to understand the patterns of social relations, interactions and constructions in which lives are embedded. The life history pushes the question whether private issues are also public matters. The life story individualises and personalises, the life history contextualises and politicises.

In moving from life stories towards life histories we move from singular narration to include other documentary sources and oral testimonies. It is important to view the self as an emergent and changing 'project' not a stable and fixed entity. Over time our view of our self changes and so therefore do the stories we tell about ourselves. In this sense, it is useful to view self definition as an ongoing narrative project.

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As the self is an ongoing narrative project, we should think more of multiple selves located in time and space. To link with this ongoing narrative project, we have to locate as well as narrate since the latter is a snapshot, a contemporary pinpoint. To locate our ongoing narrative requires sources which develop our social history and social geography of circumstances and in many instances collaboration with others to provide contextual and intertextual commentary. Along side narration, therefore, we need location and collaboration.

The reasons for location and collaboration arise from two particular features of life stories. First, the life story reflects partial and selective consciousness of subjective story building and self building; and secondly, it is a contemporary pin point, a snapshot at a particular time. Collaboration and location allow us to get a finer sense of the emergent process of self building and story telling and allow us to provide a social context of the time and space in which the story is located.

Studying The Teachers Life and Work

So a teacher as reader may say: "I am a teacher who tells stories, that ignore social context". So what! I can see that's a theoretical problem for an educational scholar like you. Why should I worry - "They're still good stories".

The reason is that stories do social and political work as they are told. A story is never just a story - it is a statement of belief, of morality, it speaks about values. Stories carry loud messages both in what they say and what they don't say. They may accept political and social priorities without comment, or they may challenge those priorities.

Why would teachers' stories, particularly those directed to the personal and practical aspects of their work, be such a problem. Educational scholarship notwithstanding why would such teachers' stories be a problem for teachers generally? How can giving someone a voice, so long silenced, be anything but a

good thing?

Let us briefly review some of the changes currently going on in the teachers life and work. Then let us see how stories of the personal and practical knowledge of teachers respond to such change. How in short do personal and practical teachers' stories respond to the forces that construct their work?

Martin Lawn (1990) has written powerfully about teachers' biographies and of how teachers' work has been rapidly restructured in England and Wales. The teacher he argues has moved from 'moral responsibility' particularly with regard to curricular matters to a narrow technical competence. Teaching in short has had its area of moral and professional judgment severely reduced. He summarizes recent changes in this way:

> In the biographies of many teachers is an experience of, and an expectation of, curriculum responsibility not as part of a job description, a task, but as part of the moral craft of teaching, the real duty. The post-war tradition of gradual involvement in curriculum responsibility at primary and second level was the result of the wartime breakdown of education, the welfare aspects of schooling and the post-war reconstruction in which teachers played a pivotal, democratic role. The role of teaching expanded as the teachers expanded the role. In its ideological form within this period, professional autonomy was created as an idea. As the post-war consensus finally collapsed and corporatism was demolished by Thatcherism, teaching was again to be reduced, shorn of its involvement in policy and managed more tightly. Teaching is to be reduced to 'skills', attending planning meetings, supervising others, preparing courses and reviewing the curriculum. It is to be 'managed' to be more 'effective'. In effect the intention is to depoliticize teaching and to turn the teacher into an educational worker. Curriculum responsibility now means supervising competencies. (p. 389)

Likewise Susan Robertson (1993) has analyzed teachers' work in the context of post-fordist economies. She argues that again the teachers' professionalism has been drastically reconstructed and replaced by a wholly 'new professionalism'.

> The new professionalism framework is one where the teacher as worker is integrated into a system where there is (i) no room to negotiate, (ii)

> reduced room for autonomy, and (iii) the commodity value of flexible specialism defines the very nature of the task. In essence, teachers have been severed from those processes which would involve them in deliberations about the future shape of their work. And while many teachers are aware that change is taking place and talk of the "good old days", few are aware of the potential profundity of that change even when it is happening in their midst. Clearly educators have been eclipsed by a core of interests from the corporate sector and selected interests co-opted in the corporate settlement.(mimeo)

Teachers personal and practical stories typically relate stories about their work and practise. So stories in the new domain described by Lawn (1990) and Robertson (1993) will be primarily stories about work where moral and professional judgement plays less and less of a part. Given their starting point such stories will speak about that which has been constructed. By focussing on the personal and practical such teachers' stories forgo the chance to speak of other ways, other people, other times and other forms of being a teacher. The focus on the personal and practical teachers' stories is then an abdication of the right to speak on matters of social and political construction. By speaking in this voice about personal and practical matters the teacher both loses a voice in the moment of speaking. For the voice that has been encouraged and granted, in the realm of personal and practical stories, is the voice of technical competency, the voice of the isolated classroom practitioner. The voice of 'ours not to reason why, ours but to do or die'.

In studying the teachers life and work in a fuller social context the intention is to collaboratively develop insights into the social construction of teaching. In this way, as we noted earlier, teachers stories of action can be reconnected with 'theories of context'. Hence teaching stories rather than passively celebrating the continual reconstruction of teaching will move to develop understandings of social and political construction. It is the move from commentary on what <u>is</u>, to cognition of what <u>might be</u>.

Studying the teachers life and work as social construction provides a

valuable lens for viewing the new moves to restructure and reform schooling. Butt et al (1992) have talked about the 'crisis of reform' when so much of the restructuring and reformist initiatives depend on prescriptions imported into the classroom but developed as political imperatives elsewhere. These patterns of intervention develop from a particular view of the teacher, a view which teachers' stories often work to confirm.

> All their lives teachers have to confront the negative stereotypes - 'teacher as robot, devil, angel, nervous Nellie' - foisted upon them by the American culture. Descriptions of teaching as a 'flat occupation with no career structure, low pay, salary increments unrelated to merit' have been paralleled with portrayals of teaching as 'one great plateau' where 'it appears that the annual cycle of the school year lulls teachers into a repetitious professional cycle of their own'.
>
> Within the educational community, the image of teachers as semi-professionals who lack control and autonomy over their own work and as persons who do not contribute to the creation of knowledge has permeated and congealed the whole educational enterprise. Researchers have torn the teacher out of the context of classroom, plagued her with various insidious effects (Hawthorne, novelty, Rosenthal, halo), parcelled out into discrete skills the unity of intention and action present in teaching practices. (p. 55)

In some ways the crisis of reform is a crisis of prescriptive optimism - a belief that what is politically pronounced and backed with armouries of accountability tests will actually happen.

I have recently examined the importance and salience of the belief in curriculum as prescription (CAP):

> CAP supports the mystique that expertise and control reside within central governments, educational bureaucracies or the university community. Providing nobody exposes this mystique, the two worlds of 'prescriptive rhetoric' and 'schooling as practise' can co-exist. Both sides benefit from such peaceful co-existence. The agencies of CAP are seen to be 'in control' and the schools are seen to be 'delivering' (and can carve out a good degree of autonomy if they accept the rules). (Goodson, 1990, p. 299)

However, there is a substantial downside to this 'historic compromise':

> There are costs of complicity in accepting the myth of prescription: above all these involve, in various ways, acceptance of established modes of power relations. Perhaps most importantly the people intimately connected with the day-to-day social construction of curriculum and schooling - teachers - are thereby effectively disenfranchised in the 'discourse of schooling'. To continue to exist, teachers' day-to-day power must remain unspoken and unrecorded. This is one price of complicity: day-to-day power and autonomy for schools and for teachers are dependent on continuing to accept the fundamental lie.(p. 300)

"In addressing the crisis of prescription and reform, it becomes imperative that we find new ways to sponsor the teacher's voice".(Goodson, 1992, p. 12)

The challenging contextual insights which come from studying the teachers life and work in a collaborative manner can be eloquently instanced in some of the work of Kathleen Casey (1992). Take for instance her study of the reasons why progressive women activists leave teaching. She notes from the beginning that many of the more conventional studies work from a functionalist managerial perspective:

> "A certain set of taken-for-granted assumptions control the way in which the problem of teachers attrition has normally been defined, one which presumes managerial solutions. Inquiries have generally been oriented by administrative demands for a stable workforce. (p. 187)

Casey decided to develop life history narratives of contemporary women teachers working for social change. She tape-recorded thirty-three such narratives in five American cities in 1984-5. In studying teacher attrition she notes the broad range of taken for granted assumption which go beyond the mere definition of the problem. "A limited number of research strategies have been employed in investigating this topic. Former members of the teaching profession have often been traced statistically, rather than in person, and information has typically been collected from such sources as district files, state departments of public instruction, or through research-conceived survey". (pp. 187-188)

The subject then has either been scrutinized at statistical distance or by

employing data collected 'from above' and beyond the teachers themselves. In effect the teachers voice has been silenced and the research paradigms employed have confirmed and echoed that silence.

> The particular configuration of selectivities and omissions which has been built into this research frame slants the shape of its findings. By systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature on educators' careers actually silences them. Methodologically, this means that even while investigating an issue where decision-making is paramount, researchers speculate on teachers' motivations, or at best, survey them with a set of forced-choice options. Theoretically, what emerges is an instrumental view of teachers, one in which they are reduced to objects which can be manipulated for particular ends. Politically, the results are educational policies constructed around institutionally convenient systems of rewards and punishments, rather than in congruence with teachers' desires to create significance in their lives. (p. 188)

Teachers attrition when seen from the perspective of women teachers life histories comes to be seen as something growing from the life and work and social context of teaching.

> Teaching takes on a distinctive meaning in these narratives; it becomes much more than the paid employment for classroom work in a specific school. Many women define being a teacher as a fundamental existential identity. When she was unable to get a teaching job, one woman explains, 'I cried and cried because I was really upset. You know, I wanted some meaning to *my* life, and some meaning for having gotten that education.' Another woman mourns the loss of her profession in this way: 'I'm a teacher at heart. I will *always* be a teacher. And I miss teaching. I miss teaching.'(p. 206)

Casey notes that the women in question celebrate an 'ethos of nurturance and growth' - "a 'tendency' which is discouraged by the management structure". She also notes that a "major explanation" for teachers attrition is in fact the antagonism between teachers and administrators.

When seen through the perspective of women's life histories 'teachers attrition' can be seen conversely as teachers liberation from 'the conditions under which these women have laboured'. In this case they miss teaching and their work

with children but the social context of teaching and politics of administrative hierarchy means that many of them move gladly to the range of "positive alternatives they have chosen". (p. 207)

Louis Smith (1992) and his colleagues chose to study educational innovation over the fifteen years of Kensington School through the life history approach. Their justification turned on reintroducing 'the person' in this case 'the teachers' into the assessment and analysis of educational innovation.

> It seems self-evident that the 'person' is an important item in any description and analysis of educational innovation. Some analytic accounts have minimized this aspect of innovation. We believe the excerpts raise a major sub-issue in the nature of the conceptualization of the person in the study of innovation. ... It has to do with the kind of personality theory to which students of innovation appeal. At times we feel we are beating the proverbial dead horse to note that the substance of the theory we have been developing is a far cry from the dominant behaviourist view in much of the innovation literature, in much of educational psychology, and in much of the educational research community. Behavioural objectives, time on tasks, mastery learning, school effectiveness, are sounds that emanate from drums and drummers distant from the language and perspectives of the innovators we have studied and the language and theory in which we have chosen to couch our own interpretations and speculations. (p. 158)

Once again then life history study helps to reformulate our understandings of innovation in education. Before these have been seen as primarily technical or political processes. Smith et al shows how "there are personality processes at work as well". Hence they argue "now when we think of school improvement we have a conception which we can use to approach any proposal for change. That seems useful for consultants asked to help, for administrators who are pushing an agenda, and for teachers who may be less than willing actors if not pawns in the process of school improvement and educational change" (p. 165). Smith's work provides life history portrayals of teachers, worked into a broad contextual understanding of the school what he calls with admirable grandeur a 'nested systems model'. We capture then how teacher life histories are lived out within, and constantly

reformulate and reconstrue, the social contexts of schooling.

This capacity to reformulate and reinterpret the prescribed agendas of schooling is often captured in the detailed life history portrayal of teachers at work in their classroom context. An example is the study by Butt et al (1992) of Glenda - at the time teaching English at the International School of Islamabad. In this life history portrayal we see how she grows confident enough to reach the stage when she can go beyond what is prescribed with confidence and competence. When her class discussions really take off and engage her children:

> "The teachers guide was closed and the students' workbooks were returned to the bookroom. The culture and knowledge within the classroom was infinitely more exciting". (p. 84)

Butt et al cryptically notes "in our future work with other biographies it will be interesting to investigate the role of curriculum guidelines in the worklife of teachers" (p. 89). By situating that inquiry within 'the worklife of teachers' we can see how life history work develops its own momentum in the search for theories of context in teachers' working lives.

Conclusion

If your worldview as expressed in stories is primarily personal and practical - you are accepting a definition of yourself as you speak. The story that is told thereby acts as an agency which individualizes and practicalizes the teacher as cultural worker. We see then how the paradox of teachers' voice resolves itself.

Teachers personal and practical stories and voices are being encouraged at a time when more and more teachers are being held accountable and having their work prescribed, interrogated and evaluated. At first sight this seems paradoxical - two movements running in a different direction.

In the event this is not the case both movements may play the same role of narrowing the teachers' area of professional competence and judgement, of social and political outreach.

This pendulum swing towards teacher's stories actually comes at a somewhat unpropitious time in my view. It sets up one of the paradoxes of postmodernism: that at precisely the time teachers are being "brought back in", their work is being vigorously restructed. Teachers voices and stories are being pursued as bona fide refective research data at a time of quite dramatic restructuring. In fact, at precisely the time the teacher's voice is being pursued and promoted, the teacher's work is being technised and narrowed. As the movement grows to celebrate teachers knowledge, it is becoming less and less promising as a focus for research and reflection. As teacher's work intensifies, as more and more centralised edicts and demands impinge on the teacher's world the space for reflection and research is progressively squeezed. It is a strange time then to evacuate traditional theory and pursue personal and practical knowledge.

A promising movement might then throw the "baby out with the bathwater". At a time of rapid restructuring, the timing of these moves seem profoundly unfortunate. To promote stories and narratives, without analysis of structures and systems, shows how the best of intentions can unwittingly complement the moves to uncouple the teacher from the wider picture. Stories and narratives can form an unintended coalition with those forces which would divorce the teacher from knowledge of political and micropolitical perspective from theory, from broader cognitive maps of influence and power. It would be an unfortunate fate for a movement that at times embraces the goal of emancipating the teacher to be implicated in the displacement of theoretical and critical analysis.

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